



High Standards for Whom?

Author(s): Donald B. Gratz

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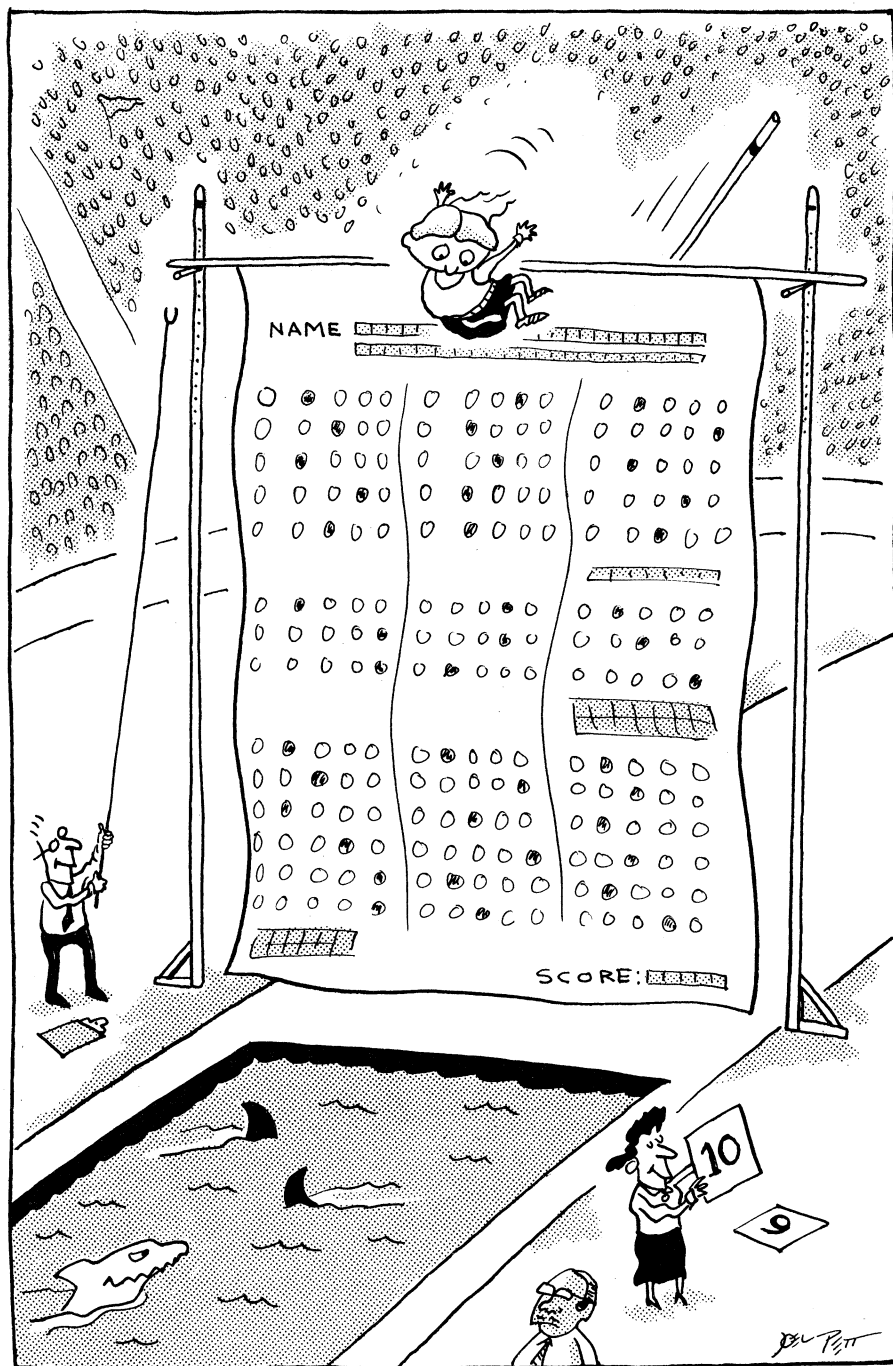
Poor implementation and unintended consequences are fueling a growing rebellion against high standards and tough tests, Mr. Gratz points out.

BY DONALD B. GRATZ

REFORMS in education tend to follow a pattern. First, the statements of the problems are more compelling, complete, and accurate than the proposed solutions. Second, the reforms overpromise, but underdeliver. Third, even the most promising initiatives usually fail when tried on a broader scale. Some are “adopted” in name but not truly implemented; others are implemented too quickly, too rigidly, with too little attention to differences between schools, or with too little regard for unintended consequences. Finally, too many education reforms are driven by political ideology rather than by what actually works in schools. Given this pattern, it is hardly surprising that most reforms have little lasting impact on schools.

If success were easier to measure, of course, the most successful practices could be identified. But educational accountability is still in its infancy, consisting primarily of average scores for an entire school on national or state tests. Testing is often handled poorly, and the tests are changed regularly, so reliable long-term data are rare-

DONALD B. GRATZ is senior associate and coordinator of national school reform, Community Training & Assistance Center, Boston.



ly available. In fact, while we know much about how children learn, few districts can demonstrate what works for which students in which settings. In the absence of proof, opinion reigns, and reform ideas proliferate. How are we to know whether the remedy is a new wonder drug or more snake oil?

The biggest current reform initiative is “world-class” standards and accountability. But as with past reforms, the compelling ideas underlying the standards movement are being distorted by poor implementation and political opportunism. Indeed, because many states are implementing standards and accountability for political rather than educational purposes, this reform will likely follow the familiar pattern. Standards will be adopted in word but not in deed by politicians and educational opportunists. They will be misused and abused for political gain. Voices of moderation will be drowned out, and negative outcomes will be obscured. When they fail to produce the promised results, teachers and students will be blamed.

An emerging rebellion — driven by negative consequences for children, parents, and teachers — will cause political support to wane. Stories of overstressed children and teachers will replace the success stories now so popular in the press. Politicians will find new villains to excoriate. The original ideas will be lost or judged failures, the good discarded along with the bad. Finally, the movement itself will be abandoned in favor of the next hot idea. Some effects will certainly linger, but the promised results will not be achieved.

If standards and accountability are to avoid this fate, they must be more than just a world-class sound bite for political leaders. If standards and accountability are to *improve* schools and help children learn rather than *punish* teachers, schools, and children for political advantage, advocates must ensure that the standards are appropriate, the tests are fair, and the implementation is reasonable. They must wrest control from the politicians and opportunists who are currently calling the shots and reshape the movement to serve educational rather than political ends.

Purposes and Professional Standards

Standards grow out of the century-old debate over tracking, the 50-year-old dis-

covery of the impact of teacher expectations, the 40-year struggle for educational equity, and the timeless desire for highly skilled (but compliant) workers to drive the nation's economic engine. These trends have converged to create support — temporarily and for various reasons — from politicians, educators, and business leaders.

Standards have two primary purposes. The first is economic: to address the concern that America is losing its competitiveness and the belief that both the country's and the students' best interests require demanding more from each child and each school. Fed by fear that we are falling behind other countries and fueled by international studies of achievement, the need to push students to learn more and faster has become a national obsession. Our students can't compete because of poor preparation, the argument goes. America is falling ever further behind, and our economy will suffer.

The second purpose of standards is to address the disparity between high- and low-achieving students. Proponents argue that raising standards for all students, teachers, and schools — especially in urban schools where students fall way below current standards — will improve education for poor and minority children. America's growing income gap is made worse, they say, by a growing education gap. Expecting little of students places them at great disadvantage. All children can live up to much higher expectations, and most will.

Standards proponents Marc Tucker and Judy Coddling put it this way:

One of the most striking features of countries that are more successful than we in educating their students to high standards is the assumption made by parents, teachers, and the students themselves that the students can do it. By contrast, the most important obstacle to high student achievement in the United States is our low expectations for students — not just students who are poor and come from minority backgrounds, but . . . most of our students.¹

Failure is built into our system, they argue. What we have is “a vast sorting system based largely on social class and racial background, with the outcome determined for many children before the game began.”²

In years past, the same kind of analy-

sis led to more *child-centered*, rather than *test-centered*, approaches to learning. But today's standards proponents point to students' weak motivation to take tough courses and to work hard in school as the source of failure. The answer, they conclude, is competition. Students in Germany and Japan are motivated to compete for the best jobs. Poor grades or lack of a diploma may mean no job or no access to college. American students and schools need an incentive to strive for higher levels of performance. Standards and accountability have emerged as the means to combat these problems. After a brief fling with national standards, proponents have shifted their efforts to the states, and it is state action that seems likely to derail the legitimate purposes of standards. Before taking up these state actions, let us review the professional standards for the standards themselves, drawn from sources across the political spectrum.

Standards for standards. There is significant agreement on the standards for standards. Proponents agree that standards should be grounded in core academic disciplines and should cover what students should know (content) and be able to do (performance). Moreover, they should address only the essentials. “A laundry list that satisfies everyone will leave teachers right where they are now — facing the impossible task of trying to rush through overstuffed textbooks and ridiculously long sets of curriculum objectives.”³ Standards should *not* “prescribe teaching methods, devise classroom strategies, or substitute for lesson plans. Standards are about ends, not means.”⁴ The choice of means should be left to local discretion. Finally, standards should be crystal clear to everyone: students, parents, and teachers.

Most proponents agree that standards should be “rigorous” and “world class.” Some refer to standards in Germany, France, Japan, or England and say that ours should be “at least as high.”⁵ Furthermore, and most critically, students should be compared with the agreed-upon standard, not with one another.

All the major proponents agree that standards must have broad support among teachers and the general public. Ownership of the standards is crucial. Even where states have created standards, districts should “engage in the process of examining, refining, and supplementing the state standards. There is simply no other way to have people ‘own’ the importance and the power of standards

or the standards themselves.”⁶ Finally, standards imply assessment. That is, they must have “teeth.” Accountability should be tied to standards for students, teachers, and schools in such a way that everyone knows what is expected and that no allowances will be made for substandard performance.

Standards for testing. Given this focus on accountability, standards for testing are also critical. And such standards already exist in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*⁷ and many other sources. To begin with, each test should be evaluated for *construct* and *content validity*, ensuring that it measures what it purports to measure (content) and that the constructs it measures are relevant and

fair. For job-related tests, such as teacher certification, constructs must be relevant to the actual job to be performed, and the content of the test must fairly measure those constructs. For tests measuring student achievement, the constructs are academic standards. They need to be relevant, age-appropriate, and fair. A separate bias review, sometimes called a sensitivity review, attempts to make certain that material that is irrelevant to the construct does not favor or derogate any particular group.

In addition to the test itself, the *passing score* must be valid as well. A test that fairly measures content can still fail too many students who should pass or pass too many who should fail. The passing score on a test used for important decisions must be carefully considered and independently validated. Finally, each aspect of test creation and validation should be documented in a *technical manual* or *review*. This is time-consuming, but fairness demands that tests, particularly high-stakes tests, be demonstrably valid and reliable.

High-stakes testing. Many states have decided that their assessments must be “high-stakes” ones — tests that significantly determine opportunities and outcomes for the test-takers. Today, radically more difficult tests (sometimes poorly designed) are being used to determine who will graduate, who will be licensed to teach, and which schools will get rewards or sanctions. In a recent study of high-stakes testing, the National Research Council concluded that educational decisions “that will have a major impact on a test taker should not be made solely or automatically on the

basis of a single test score.” Even if the test is a *good* one. Furthermore, the NRC strongly urged that decisions about children below age 8 or grade 3 should not be made on the basis of such a test.⁸ A 1998 study of the Chicago schools reached a similar conclusion: that the district’s much-vaunted improvement should not be judged solely by standardized test scores.⁹

Punishment or improvement. Mandatory tests are the main mechanism for imple-

Accountability systems designed to help schools improve will downplay cross-school comparisons.

menting state standards. But it is important to note that accountability can be exercised for more than one purpose. Methodologies differ depending on the intent. As now implemented in most states, standards and accountability appear to be designed primarily to identify and punish “poor-performing” schools and students. If that were not so, leaders pushing accountability would focus on how much students within a given school have improved rather than on total scores at one school compared with scores at others.

Accountability systems designed to *help schools improve* and *help students learn* will downplay cross-school comparisons in favor of improvement for individual children. They will give students time to reach the goals. They will break down or disaggregate data to make sure that all students in a school are improving, and they will use those data to identify and learn from the “pockets of success.” A suburban school may do well for its college-bound students but serve its non-college-bound, low-income, or minority students poorly. Aggregate test scores are excellent tools for identifying targets for punishment, but they mask these discrepancies. Accountability for the purpose of improvement highlights them.

Standards for all. Surprisingly, many states appear to have excused themselves from applying high professional standards to their own actions. Most focus on punishing poor-performing schools, creating great political opportunity but little improvement. In many states, standards and tests drive most of the curriculum; almost all states

measure students against one another at a specific time rather than providing time to meet goals. High-stakes tests are being used as the sole determiners for important decisions, even for young children. Some of these tests bear little relation to the adopted standards; others are poorly constructed, not validated, too hard, politically driven, and shrouded in secrecy. Many districts have their own high-quality standards and assessment rubrics, but state-driven tests are currently setting the agenda. These implementation policies, already breeding skepticism and resistance, seem likely to widen the gap between the educational haves and have-nots, a sad irony for a movement intended to increase equity for all children.

Politics and the Problem of Implementation

Public institutions are often accused of having entrenched bureaucracies with scant ability to accomplish even the simplest improvements. They are highly resistant to change. As Charles Lindblom observed many years ago, bureaucratic action and slow change can be understood as adaptive measures that help public institutions survive in a hostile and rapidly changing environment.¹⁰ Imagine the chaos if schools transformed themselves with each new educational idea. This organizational attribute helps suggest how to proceed in order to create lasting change. In both education and business, a constituency for change must be developed over time, with maximum local latitude and slow, careful implementation. The notion that a school district can fully implement substantive change in a year or two is absurd.

Value of failure. Politics, by contrast, requires decisive action. Politicians thrive on tough talk. Instead of proposing complex solutions to complex problems, many politicians seek villains to fight. Government has been an enemy of choice for years. Attacking the bureaucracy wins elections; tilting at perceived governmental windmills has advanced many careers. Candidates promise to root out corruption, fire lazy bureaucrats, and get government off our backs. If one believes the current political rhetoric, lazy, incompetent teachers, administrators, and students are destroying the

fabric of society and endangering the economy. Naturally, we need tough politicians to take on these demons.

In this context, consider the critical value of tough new standards and massive failure, whether by students, schools, or aspiring teachers. High standards are set. State tests, which provide apparent objectivity, are developed or chosen. Suddenly we have *proof* of massive incompetence, sloth, and ineffectiveness. What politician can resist the temptation to take a tough

stance, even if it means using invalid or unfair assessments, accelerating the speed of improvement demanded, ignoring complaints about fairness, or castigating innocent people caught in the middle? The answer, it appears, is not many. Forcing tough standards on “failing schools” has helped elect many sitting governors and legislators. But will these same politicians (or their successors) provide the long-term support those tough standards require?

Linking state-driven assessments to state-developed standards has created political salience for education reform and given politicians a marvelous opportunity to show their mettle. But in the rush to implement tough tests and standards, professional standards have not been maintained. The failure of children, teachers, and schools to meet standards — no matter how unclear, inadequate, or unfair — has created a crisis of great value to some politicians. Massachusetts made headlines last year for the nation’s dumbest crop of aspiring teachers, while most of Virginia’s students are apparently headed for failure. California has developed and mandated its own state standards, but it is measuring them with a nationally normed test that does not match those standards. It is now “augmenting” that test with new tests aligned to its standards, but it may reconstitute hundreds of schools and flunk thousands of students before it can validate and use the augmentation. How likely is it that these crises will remain politically valuable in the coming years, particularly if the “solutions” don’t work or produce negative consequences?

Despite evidence to the contrary, state officials argue that their tests are reasonable, have been “validated” by “panels of experts,” will not result in teaching to the test, and will not cause students or teachers to give up, cheat, or drop out. They say that

tough tests are needed to promote world-class standards. These tests and standards often fail to meet professional standards, but they do meet the standards for political expedience. They make headlines, provide the veneer of objectivity, and offer up plenty of villains to be denounced. They provide a political platform, as Gerald Bracey has noted regarding Virginia, but “the results mean a great loss of credibility for the standard-setting procedure. There’s no

Failure to meet standards has created a crisis of great value to some politicians.

evidence that setting these standards results in higher performance.”¹¹ There is evidence, however, that they are causing resistance.

Redefining the problem. This massive educational experiment has been based primarily on the first purpose stated above: fear that American students can’t compete in the world marketplace and are endangering America’s future. But, as columnist Robert Samuelson has asked, “If our students are so bad, why is the economy so good?”¹² The Japanese schools to which we still compare ours unfavorably have not kept Japan from deep economic problems. Furthermore, as Henry Levin has noted, “There is no doubt that education, more generally, is an important determinant of earnings. But there is an enormous chasm between this fact and the assertion that new educational performance standards for students will lead to greater economic productivity.”¹³

And many of the strongest supporters of standards have begun to shift the grounds for their support. Even the Hudson Institute, which in 1987 equated higher standards in schools with international competitiveness, now emphasizes “equitable distribution of income” as the reason for standards.¹⁴ While the significant disparity between and within American schools is a serious problem, the political need to focus on competition with the Germans and Japanese still drives the movement for “world-class” standards and punitive accountability in most states. Unfortunately, a system of standards designed to level the playing field between urban and suburban schools — which might help students who are struggling — would

not look the same as one designed to be the world’s toughest.

Most suburban schools today teach such topics as algebra, biology, and Shakespeare years earlier than they did a generation ago. Today’s students also have more homework. Those who do the work get into the best colleges in the world. These students don’t need higher standards. By contrast, some schools are inferior, and students in them learn little. While *equivalent* standards and accountability based on how much each child *improves* might address the equity questions, the relentless drive toward ever higher standards serves to *widen* the performance gap between and within schools.

In Texas, for example, higher standards and high-stakes tests have resulted in much higher dropout and failure rates for poor and minority students.¹⁵

By all means let us have standards. But let us also design them appropriately, implement them fairly, provide help rather than punishment, and recognize improvement for students from their various starting places. Finally, let us apply high standards to everyone, including those political and educational leaders who have enforced standards on others. That would be real reform.

Unintended Consequences

Beyond this political and bureaucratic hypocrisy, the biggest reason for the growing disenchantment with standards and high-stakes tests is that the unintended consequences of ill-considered implementation in many states are already being felt. In service of the contradictory goals described above, we are creating higher levels of competition and stiffer sanctions for “low” performance, substantially increasing the pressure on students and schools.

In response, schools are resorting to a range of improvement strategies. Some of them are promising. Schools in many states are upgrading and realigning curricula, training parents to help their children, creating faculty task forces to draw up plans for improvement, and providing extra help to struggling students. Chicago’s summer schools are a frequently cited example.

At the same time, many schools and teachers are resorting to such strategies as piling on homework, abolishing recess for

young children, cheating on tests, transferring pressure to students, flunking more students, teaching to the test, and seeking ways to rid themselves of low performers. It is easy to fault schools for taking such actions, but these tactics are the direct result of "rigorous" standards, unfair tests, harsh sanctions, unrealistically stringent expectations for change, implementation strategies designed to punish rather than improve, and a system built to satisfy political rather than educational needs. Below I list some of the unintended consequences already emerging for children and families. And remember, most of the high stakes — retaining students, preventing them from graduating, and reconstituting schools — have not yet been applied.

Stress. In his 1981 book, *The Hurried Child*, David Elkind wrote that "today's child has become the unwilling, unintended victim of overwhelming stress — stress borne of rapid, bewildering social change and constantly rising expectations. . . . Tests are now determining school curriculum, and the conduct of teaching is beginning

to look more and more like that of a factory foreman than that of a true teacher."¹⁶ That was 1981. What about today? As of the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, 19 states had "exit exams" that students must pass in order to graduate. Seven more were planning similar tests. Six states planned to tie promotion to tests. Louisiana has tests for fourth and eighth grades, for example, and Ohio will soon have a fourth-grade test.¹⁷

If anyone doubts that increasing stress is a consequence of such testing, there is plenty of evidence. Homework has increased, free play has been curtailed, recess has been eliminated, and pressured teachers are pressuring children. The comments of a South Carolina kindergarten teacher, feeling the pressure of that state's third-grade test, are telling. "I used to teach letters of the week," notes the teacher. But times have changed. They can "play and nap" at home, she says. "They are here to learn."¹⁸

We used to believe that play was the work of young children, that play was how

they learned. The headmaster of an elite private school draws the following conclusion from statistics about the dramatic drop in free play among preschoolers. "For those of us in education who know that childhood's 'free play' is as critically effective in building SAT scores as time spent on 'academics,' these data explain, in part, why today's children arrive at our privileged school doors with social skills and vocabularies *far* less developed than those of prior generations" (emphasis in original).¹⁹

Homework. Despite the apparently widespread belief that kids are lazy and homework a thing of the past, *Time* last year highlighted too much homework as a serious and growing problem. In a cover article, Romesh Ratnesar wrote, "The sheer quantity of nightly homework and the difficulty of assignments can turn ordinary weeknights into four-hour library-research excursions, leave kids in tears and parents with migraines, and generally transform the placid refuge of home life into a tense war zone."²⁰ Part of the problem, he argues, is parents who push their children hard and demand that teachers deliver enough "academic rigor" to get students into top secondary schools and colleges. But the greater part comes from increased pressure from schools. In 1981, the year *The Hurried Child* was published, the average time that grade school students spent on homework was 85 minutes a week; by 1997, it had grown to 134 minutes, an increase of nearly 60%.

The *Time* story also noted that some urban schools assign little or no homework because the students don't do it, while many suburban schools are piling on more than ever. Mandatory standards are supposed to make lazy students and teachers change their ways. But if motivated students who have internalized the high expectations of their parents and teachers have trouble completing their homework, students who struggle with academic work, who don't care, who work long hours, whose parents are working when the students are at home, or whose households provide little support or room for homework will have even more difficulty. Pressure from homework that is too hard or too long is a symptom of problems in some schools, just as the absence of homework is a symptom of problems in others. Until parents put a stop to homework overload, which they eventually will, the most likely effect of this trend will be more pressure on students and an increasing disparity between the achieve-



"This backpack thing is getting completely out of hand."

ment of students in suburban and urban schools — just the opposite of the intent of standards.

Recess. Recess for elementary children has become another casualty of high standards in many schools. “Across the country,” according to *Education USA*, “educators are doing away with the once standard breaks, citing increasing academic pressure as the primary reason.” Child advocates estimate that as many as 40% of the nation’s 16,000 school districts — including large districts such as Atlanta and Orlando — have either curtailed or eliminated recess.

Educators engaged in this practice say that “time, safety, and academic pressure” are all factors that contribute to the decline of recess. Eliminating the breaks allows students to spend more time in the classroom. “We are intent on improving academic performance,” explains Benjamin Canada, who served as Atlanta’s school superintendent before taking over the system in Portland, Oregon. “You don’t do that by having kids hanging from monkey bars.”²¹ Some schools have not only eliminated recess but significantly scaled back the lunch period. Others have combined physical education and recess, providing some physical activity a few times a week, but no “free time” for children.

Child development experts are concerned about this trend, for reasons of physical and mental fitness and social development. Most adults get coffee breaks, but children need breaks much more than adults. Children who get breaks are more alert and pay better attention. They also need unstructured social time to learn to interact with their peers. Eliminating free play and physical activity for children runs counter to both research on child development and common sense. And it will not improve achievement. Parents in some cities have prevented the elimination of recess, and child advocates are fighting back. But if this is the result of world-class standards and high-stakes tests, how long will they last? How long *should* they last?

Social promotion. Critics complain about students who are passed on year after year without learning, a problem that affects many students in some cities. “Social promotion” is another dream issue for politicians, another chance to get tough. How-

ever, flunking or retaining students is a “solution” with an unbroken record of failure. In many cases, researchers say, retaining students actually pushes them to drop out of school. “If you look at the evidence about kids retained, they don’t get better over the long term. They fall further behind,” according to Arthur Reynolds.²² “Students who have been held back,” says Robert Hauser, chair of the National Research Council’s panel on testing, “are much more likely to drop out before completing

“Social promotion” is another dream issue for politicians, another chance to get tough.

high school.” He cites a Chicago study that found that retaining students in grades 1-8 increased the dropout rate by 12%, corrected for student background. This is a huge negative effect. Unless massive extra help is provided, large-scale retention may dramatically increase the dropout rate. As Hauser observes, “We should know that a new policy works before we try it out on a large scale.”²³

If more students drop out, of course, test scores will go up. But does the goal of increasing test scores justify the probable impact on struggling students? The problem may be real, but the solution has been shown to make things worse.

Motivation. Promoters of world-class standards argue that competition pushes students to excel, but human motivation is more complex than this one-size-fits-all approach. There is no single problem of student motivation, nor is there a single solution. Moreover, stiff competition already exists for entry into the best colleges and access to the best jobs, and students motivated by this kind of competition already work very hard. State tests mean little to these students, but they instill the fear of failure in others. Studies have repeatedly shown that such methods *reduce* learning for many students.

Students who have slacked off may work harder, but others simply stop working in order to justify the expected failure. “Motivation experts say many elements of the current push to hold schools and students to higher academic standards

work against the very classroom conditions that research has shown can spark a desire to learn,” according to *Education Week*.²⁴

Labeling students failures because they do not reach a particular standard or national norm at a particular point in time counters one of the central standards for standards. Yet most states do just that. With standards rising at every level, the only chance students have to “catch up” is in high school, where most states allow a retake. By that point, however, students think they know how smart or dumb they are. Turning up the pressure will not help these youngsters care more or achieve more. Mandated after-school and summer programs may help some students, but not

those who already believe they are failures. Thoughtfully implemented standards, along with the funding to create instructional alternatives, might help. Sanctions against schools are supposed to lead to such innovation. The current sledgehammer approach seems more likely to drive students away from learning.

Increasing inequity. One of the fundamental reasons cited for developing high standards has always been that students who graduate from a low-standards school will be unable to compete in the marketplace, thus increasing the pronounced economic division that already exists in our country. But high-stakes tests don’t solve this problem; they make it worse. In Texas, for example, low-income and minority students have been denied graduation in much greater numbers than other students. Will this help their economic prospects? Will high-stakes tests force more students to drop out? Will states be willing to fund the summer and after-school programs, tutoring, additional professional development, and the other strategies these students need to succeed? There has been no great funding bonanza so far. As of January 1999, only 11 states offered extra funding to help schools pay for improvements, and, while the tests affect every school, the funding does not.²⁵

Summary

Negative consequences. In a high-stress world, greater pressure on schools is creating greater pressure on children and fami-

lies. Policies governing homework, recess, retention, and testing are ignoring research on student learning and motivation in favor of conventional wisdom and political expediency. Inconsistent, hurried, thoughtless, mean-spirited, and politically motivated implementation of standards and accountability is leading to negative consequences for children.

In response, schools are devising some policies that may help, but they are also cheating on tests, teaching to the test, and transferring pressure to the students who need the most help. The results of this pressure are still unclear, but the possibilities are troubling. Forcing schools to adopt increasingly rigid curricula, with more knowledge of more subjects expected at earlier ages, seems unlikely to produce the desired results. Retaining low-performing students because it is politically expedient to do so is likely to increase the number of dropouts — the opposite of the stated goal of increasing the achievement of “failing” students. Certainly, passing students from grade to grade without regard to what they have learned is a serious problem in some districts, but flunking struggling students is demonstrably not the solution.

By downplaying children's need to play, to be active, to experiment, and to develop socially and physically, we may be producing children who are physically unfit, mentally uncreative, and socially inept. “When young people's developmental needs for protection and nurture are ignored,” Elkind warns, “when their human differences in growth rates and behavior are deemed deviant, and when they are given little or no space to live and to grow, they are stressed.”²⁶ He continues:

On every measure that we have, children and youth today are doing less well than they did hardly a quarter century ago. On tests of strength, endurance, and general muscle tone, young people today perform less well than did young people of comparable age even ten years ago. There has been a 50% increase in obesity in children and youth. . . . Many of our curriculum-focused schools, in an effort to cut costs or to increase time spent on academic work, have eliminated recess . . . there is not time during the school day for young people to get up, run about, and play. . . . The post-modern perception of children as competent and teenagers as sophisticated has resulted in pushing advanced curricula

down even further into the lower grades.²⁷

Elkind links these pressures to the increase in escapist and destructive behaviors. Higher standards and harsh categorizations may lead more youths to decide that they can't win in the race. It seems likely, therefore, that greater pressure on “low-performing” schools and students will result in greater numbers of dropouts — both because they can't do the work and because they don't see the point. These are not intended consequences of high standards, but they are the predictable results of greater stress and the breakdown of supportive environments.

Rebellion. The signs of rebellion grow daily. Evidence includes regular reports of increased pressure, competition between suburban communities for the highest test scores, cheating on tests, cheating on test reporting, outrage over the elimination of recess, and lawsuits over and boycotts of high-stakes tests.

The ideas underlying the standards and accountability movement have merit, and the inequities among schools must be addressed. But if standards and accountability are to survive and support student learning, significant changes in implementation must occur. Educators, parents, and other taxpayers must demand that state leaders strictly follow professional standards. They must make sure that the impact of new policies is evaluated. They must publicize what is known about how children learn and are motivated, and they must ensure that children are treated in accordance with their developmental needs.

It is not too late to slow down the runaway train that is the standards movement. But that effort must be made soon. If standards were implemented as they have been so often described, and if multiple accountability measures were used to improve schools rather than to punish them, real school improvement might follow. If the creators and proponents of standards held themselves to high professional and ethical standards, everyone would benefit. Unfortunately, continuing the tradition of education reform, political expediency is once again trumping educational need. The vision for standards is far from the reality, the list of unintended consequences is growing longer, and new signs of the coming rebellion are appearing every day.

1. Marc S. Tucker and Judy B. Coddling, *Standards*

for Our Schools (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), p. 33.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

3. Matthew Gandal, “Not All Standards Are Created Equal,” *Educational Leadership*, March 1995, p. 19.

4. Chester E. Finn, Jr., Michael J. Petrilli, and Gregg Vanourek, “The State of State Standards: Four Reasons Why Most ‘Don't Cut the Mustard,’” *Education Week*, 11 November 1998, p. 39.

5. Tucker and Coddling, p. 45; and Gandal, p. 19.

6. Christopher T. Cross, “The Standards Wars: Some Lessons Learned,” *Education Week*, 21 October 1998, pp. 32-35.

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